

Utah will continue to serve as an example for the Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). The Senator from Texas.

JUNETEENTH

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate moved a historic bill one step closer to President Biden's desk. The Senate unanimously passed legislation to finally make Juneteenth a Federal holiday and to preserve the legacy of that momentous day for generations to come.

For more than a century, Texans have celebrated Juneteenth and commemorated the anniversary of the day slaves in Texas were first informed of the news that they were, indeed, free. President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, but the news didn't reach Texas for 2½ years, until June 19, 1865.

We were the first State to make Juneteenth a holiday and, of course, it commemorates an event that occurred in Galveston, TX. But over the last four decades, many other States have joined us.

It is finally time to recognize Juneteenth as a national holiday. I reintroduced this bipartisan bill with the Senator from Massachusetts, Senator MARKEY, this year, and I have been proud to work alongside my fellow Texan Congresswoman, SHEILA JACKSON LEE, in the House to get the bill passed and signed into law. The bill now heads to the House and according to Congressman STENY HOYER, the House will actually pass it today.

I will have more to say about the history and significance of Juneteenth tomorrow, but for now, I want to thank the dozens of Senators on both sides of the aisle who have supported this effort. I think, particularly now at this point in our Nation's history, a little reconciliation can go a long way.

It is also an opportunity to learn from our past. America is the greatest Nation in the world, but we are not perfect and, indeed, the original sin of slavery when this country was created has caused this country a lot of angst, death, and injustice over the years. We fought a civil war, and 600,000 Americans died. If you extrapolated that to current population, that would be like 3 million Americans dying.

Of course, we went through the civil rights movement in the sixties, and, of course, the latest manifestation of racial strife is the unfortunate killing of people like George Floyd and the lack of trust that exists between some law enforcement and the communities that they serve.

While America is not perfect, we continue to do the work to strive to be "a more perfect Union," in the words of the Constitution.

IRAN

Mr. President, this Friday, Iran will hold its 13th Presidential election, but unlike Presidential elections in the United States or in any other legitimate democracy, this process in Iran is

more about providing the appearance of a democracy than an actual democratic process.

In America, elections are conduits for change. If the American people don't like their elected officials or the direction of their government, they can change it. In Iran, elections are a sham. The candidates are hand selected, the result predetermined, and the opportunity for change nonexistent.

The process for electing the President of Iran is just a few steps shy of the fabricated elections in places like Iraq under Saddam Hussein. In 2002, Saddam won reelection by 11 million votes—11 million to 0—and there was reported to be 100 percent turnout. In fact, there weren't any other candidates running. In fact, the question on the ballot asked if Saddam should remain in office, check yes or no.

It reminds me of the story I heard about that time of a reporter traveling with a driver whom he had hired to drive him around Iraq to report on conditions there. The reporter asked—when he learned that there was 100-percent turnout and Saddam Hussein won by 100 percent of the votes, he said to this driver: Well, you have been with me; how did you vote? And he said: Saddam must have known what was in my heart.

That, to me, is maybe apocryphal, but a demonstration how even the dictators like Saddam Hussein, even the Ayatollah in Iran, still want to give the appearance of democracy, even though they deny it to their very own people.

In Iran, the situation isn't much different than the election under Saddam Hussein. It is just a larger effort to create the appearance of choices.

While the Iranian people may vote for the eventual winner, there is a highly controlled process that selects the pool of candidates, and the puppeteer behind the curtain is the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

Unlike a true democracy, the candidates for President of Iran are not selected by the Iranian people. They are selected behind closed doors by a powerful group called the Guardian Council. This group, itself, is comprised of 12 people. Half are selected by the Supreme Leader and the other half are selected by the Parliament.

But Parliament can't select just anyone for this position. These six jurists are chosen from the options presented to the Parliament by the Chief Justice, and the Chief Justice—you might have guessed—is appointed by the Supreme Leader.

This contrived election is not the result of a fair and democratic process. So the candidates hardly represent the will of the Iranian people. Of the 592 registered candidates, only 7 were approved by the Guardian Council—5 conservatives and 2 so-called reformists.

The Guardian Council, in fact, prevented most reformists or moderate candidates from even participating in

the race, and the candidate pool was carefully whittled down to a point that the outcome is virtually a known certainty.

All signs point to the eventual winner being Ebrahim Raisi, the favorite of the Supreme Leader and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. It is easy to see why Mr. Raisi is the chosen front man for the corrupt leaders of a brutal regime, because his resume is nothing less than a long list of atrocities. Mr. Raisi's first step to power came after the 1979 Revolution.

Throughout the 1980s, he gained more power and influence and the trust of the Ayatollah. In 1988, he was chosen to be one of the four members of the so-called "death commission" charged with carrying out executions of Iranians' political prisoners. Mr. Raisi played a central role in these executions, which took place over the course of 5 months.

It is difficult for us to be sure how many political prisoners were killed, but it is widely known to be in the thousands. Some believe the death toll could be as high as 30,000 from these death commissions.

Mr. Raisi's reign of terror did not stop there. He continued to serve in high-ranking positions throughout the government and inflict violence on dissidents. He currently serves as the Judiciary Chief, where he continues to direct the execution of protesters and ethnic minority groups. Once again, this mass murderer is expected to be the next President of Iran.

This election comes at a very precarious time for the regime. Iran has experienced major uprisings since the last election in 2017. Popular slogans included: "Death to the dictator" and "Our enemy is right here; they lie when they say it is America."

Iranian citizens place the responsibility for the economic crisis that the country is currently experiencing on the regime that controls the country. The vast majority of Iranians live below the poverty line, and the government's pathetic mishandling of COVID-19 has made already harsh circumstances even more unbearable.

The Iranian people know this election is a sham. Candidates approved by the Supreme Leader offer no window for the freedoms and change that they desperately want and desperately need.

The Iranian resistance has called for an all-out boycott of the elections, and turnout is expected to be the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

For the United States and our allies, this changing of the guard cannot be just a blip on the radar, because Iran continues to commit human rights abuses and back terrorist organizations and authoritarian figures, including dictators around the world.

Currently, two Iranian warships are making their way across the Atlantic, and we have reason to believe that these ships are carrying missile-equipped fast-attack boats and other military equipment to Venezuela.